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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to investigate: (1) what linguistic and mental abilities are involved in composition; (2) to what extent undergraduate students in India possess these abilities, in English and in their native language; and (3) to what extent these abilities are being taught. The major portion of the paper discusses the nature of composition, its value as text (cohesion), and its value as message (coherence). Composition features which produce coherence are analyzed in a hierarchy of three categories: communicative purpose, communicative function, and communicative act. The various language functions and their corresponding speech factors are tabulated. The purpose, function, and acts of expository writing which most students will use are detailed. Informational strategies used in composition writing -- the synthesis, structuring, weighting, signposting, redundancy, surprise value, and tonality of the information are discussed. An empirical investigation of the student papers revealed that they did not possess in their native language or in English the skills necessary for composition writing. These skills must be taught concurrently with the grammar of the language. (PMJ)

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An Investigation of Some Advanced Skills of Composition

Bikram K. Das

1.0 This paper is a partial report on a study conducted to investigate:

- i. what linguistic and mental abilities are involved in composition, beyond a basic proficiency in syntax and lexis;
- ii. to what extent students at the undergraduate level in India possess these abilities, in English and their mother tongues; and
- iii. to what extent these abilities are being 'taught' under existing conditions.

2.0 Some of the assumptions and concepts underlying the study were:

- i. Basic proficiency in syntax and lexis is a minimum but not a sufficient requirement for proficiency in composition.
- ii. Since composition involves communication through stretches of language larger than the sentence, the abilities—both mental and linguistic—required for composition extend beyond the abilities required to produce acceptable grammatical sentences.

Thus, while basic proficiency in syntax and lexis is adequate for the production of acceptable grammatical sentences, it is not adequate for composition.

- iii. To be able to communicate effectively through composition, the language learner must acquire certain 'advanced skills' of composition, in addition to basic proficiency in syntax and lexis.
- iv. The clue to the nature of these advanced skills lies in the properties that distinguish composition from a mere conglomerate of grammatical sentences.
- v. Composition is, fundamentally, a sequential combination of sentences existing in various *structural* relationships, and fulfilling *communicative functions* which cannot be realised through the individual sentences.

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- vi. Composition, thus, has two aspects distinguishing it from a set of unrelated grammatical sentences: the *formal* and the *functional*.

Since form is only the 'visible' realisation of underlying function, the latter is more basic to the nature of composition.

- vii. At the formal level, composition is characterised by the structural relationships between the constituent sentences, combining to form a *text*.

These relationships determine the *cohesion* of composition. (Cf. Widdowson, 1973)

- viii. At the functional level, composition is characterised by the *rhetorical* relationships between its constituent parts (which may or may not correspond to the sentences in the text), combining to form a *message*.

These relationships determine the *coherence* of composition.

- ix. Thus, the characteristics distinguishing composition from a mere set of grammatical sentences are:

- a. cohesion, or *value-as-text*; and
- b. coherence, or *value-as-message*.

The advanced skills of composition are related, therefore, to the properties of cohesion and coherence. These properties are products of the advanced skills.

- x. Cohesion is purely a linguistic phenomenon, realised in composition through linguistic—chiefly, syntactic and lexical—choices.

Coherence, on the other hand, is a complex rhetorical phenomenon, realised in part through logico-semantic as well as socio-linguistic choices determined by the contexts of culture and situation.

(We use the term 'rhetorical' to refer comprehensively to the entire range of choices which determine the coherence of composition. It was partly the aim of the study to investigate the precise nature of these 'rhetorical' elements existing in composition.)

- xi. Normally, coherence and cohesion are *interdependent* in composition.

A piece of composition possesses cohesion or textual unity by virtue of the underlying rhetorical relationships between its parts.

However, its effectiveness as *message* depends largely on the kinds of linguistic (syntactic and lexical) choices made in the realisation of the text.

- xii. It is possible, however, for coherence and cohesion to exist independently of each other.

This is illustrated through the following pairs of sentences:

1. I love big cities. The rain stays mainly in the plain.
2. I love big cities. However, the rain stays mainly in the plain.
3. I love big cities. How many dentists there are in Hyderabad!
4. I love big cities. I visit Hyderabad often.
5. I love big cities. However, I visit Hyderabad often.

Example (1) has neither cohesion nor coherence, while (2) has cohesion without coherence. Example (3) has no cohesion, but may conceivably have coherence. The recognition of coherence depends, however, on the availability of additional information not carried by either of the two sentences—e.g., the state of the speaker's oral health, and his consequent dependence on dentists! Coherence, in the absence of cohesion, is, therefore, dependent on 'foreknowledge' and the context of situation.

In (4) the cohesion is less obvious than in (2) or (5): instead of an explicit syntactic link ('however'), we have a semantic parallelism between 'love' and 'visit often'. This semantic linkage sets up a certain expectancy: one *expects* a certain kind of logical relationship between the two sentences in (4)—a 'therefore' (cause-effect) or 'and' (supporting parallel information) rather than a 'however' (contrast) relationship. However, this can be confirmed only if one possesses, once again, contextual information not contained in either of the two sentences. One can be reasonably certain that the sentences do not exist in 'however' relationship only if one *knows* that Hyderabad is a big city. The dependence on contextual information is drastically reduced in (5) by the presence of the explicit syntactic link ('however'); one can be fairly certain now, without relying on any other clue, that Hyderabad is *not* a big city. (If it is, the logic combining the two sentences must be perverse.)

Coherence seems, here, to be a function of cohesion; in the absence of obvious cohesive signals, coherence rests on the availability of contextual information.

This explains why cohesion is far more essential in *written* communication than in speech. Normally, in a speech situation—particularly with several participants involved—a certain amount of contextual and pre-suppositional information is assumed, though there may be no indication of this in the language actually used by

the participants. This is made possible by the proximity of the participants, in both space and time, to each other and to the 'setting' in which communication takes place—something that does not obtain in written communication. Moreover, the linguistic (verbal) channel is only one of several channels of communication in use in a speech situation: large amounts of information may be carried through such paralinguistic channels as gesture, posture, expression and kinesics (physical contact). A tape-recording of a conversation may, therefore, capture only a limited part of the information actually present and available to the participants.

Oral communication is thus heavily dependent on contextual as well as paralinguistic information and, consequently, less dependent on language. Written communication, on the other hand, is dependent almost entirely on the linguistic channel—chiefly, syntax and lexis, since even the resources of phonology are not here available. Furthermore, written communication, unlike speech, is largely autonomous or independent of a physical setting, since the writer is detached from the reader in time as well as space. All the essential information must be conveyed (from the writer to the reader) through language alone.

The partial liberation from language makes oral communication less dependent on cohesion; but in writing, coherence seems to be governed by the explicitness of cohesion. (We are considering here only functional or pragmatic communication between the members of a linguistic community, and not the creative and imaginative uses of language.) It is possible, however, as illustrated above, for cohesion to exist without coherence.

- xiii. Despite the relationship of interdependence existing between cohesion and coherence, particularly in writing, it is reasonable to think of coherence as being primary and more basic to composition than cohesion.

Composition is primarily a communicative device, designed to serve a social or pragmatic end. The properties of composition as *text* are only incidental to its properties as *message*, and derived from them. Basically, function determines form, and not vice-versa.

The 'effectiveness' of composition is thus primarily determined by coherence.

In keeping with this assumption, the study was devoted primarily to the problems of coherence. A similar concern is reflected in

the work of other writers on discourse such as Widdowson (1973), Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and Selinker et al (1975).

It was assumed, for the purposes of the study, that the 'effectiveness' of composition is determined chiefly by coherence.

3.0 The basic problem in any study of coherence is that of determining which features of composition account for the property of coherence. Determining cohesion is relatively simple, since it is achieved through *observable* syntactic and lexical devices. Coherence, on the other hand, seems to depend on—among other things—the successful use of *logical structures* and *communicative strategies* which may not have a simple correlation to linguistic forms and are, therefore, less susceptible of observation.

An attempt was made, in this study, to set up criteria to evaluate coherence, partly utilising concepts derived from recent work in discourse analysis. Some of these are enunciated below.

3.1 The coherence of a piece of composition, or its 'value' as a piece of communication, depends on the *communicative functions* which are realised in it.

A *communicative function* is a 'rhetorical act', possessing a certain 'illocutionary force' (Austin, 1962). It represents something that is actually 'done' through a particular stretch of language, in addition to what is 'said'.

A *communicative function* may be described in terms of what the reader (in the case of composition) 'understands' a particular stretch of language to intend—of the response (physical, emotional or intellectual) which it is expected to elicit, or the effect it is intended to produce.

3.1.1. A communicative function is (hypothetically) made up of *communicative acts*.

A *communicative act* represents the smallest 'unit' constituting a 'message'.

(*Communicative acts* may be considered analogous to the category of 'speech acts', in Searle, 1969.)

3.2 The *communicative functions* and *communicative acts* in a 'message' are determined by the *communicative purpose* (the purpose of communication).

A hierarchy thus exists between the three categories proposed: *communicative purpose*, *communicative function* and *communicative act*.

Hierarchical relationships between the 'units' of rhetorical function have been proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) as well as Selinker et al

(1975), though neither Austin (1962) nor Searle (1969), whose work in this area has been seminal, propose such a hierarchy.

While the possibility of such a hierarchy is supported by intuition (in the sense that some functions of language are obviously of a higher 'level' than others and seem to include a number of subordinate functions), the *rigid* hierarchy of units, insisted on by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), in terms of a 'rank scale', does not seem to be necessary, at least for this study. On the whole, the hierarchical model proposed for this study corresponds to the 'multi-layered' model of language functions proposed by Selinker et al (1975).

3.3 The hierarchical relationships between communicative *purpose*, *functions* and *acts* constitute the *rhetorical structure* of discourse.

3.4 An important assumption for this study is that the rhetorical structure of any given discourse 'type' is different from that of any other 'type'. In analysing rhetorical structure, therefore, it is necessary to specify the *type* of discourse (or composition) being considered.

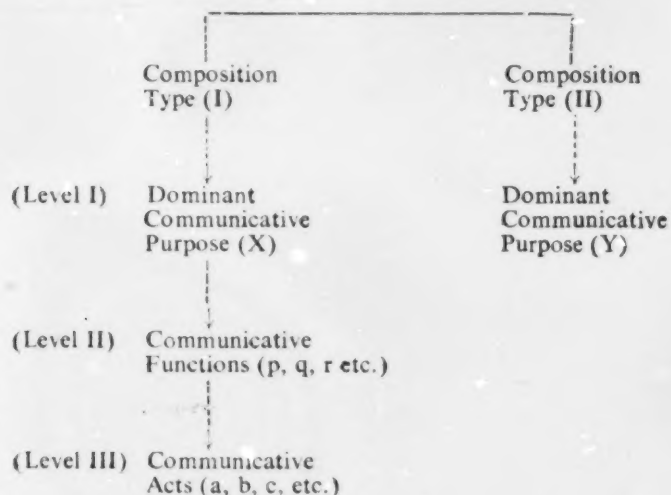
3.5 In conventional rhetoric, composition is categorised into such 'types' as descriptive/narrative/expository/argumentative, etc. The basis for such classification is not always clear, and there is generally an overlap of categories.

However, the 'types' existing in composition may conveniently be categorised on the basis of the *purpose* (or aim) of communication, as proposed by Kinneavy (1971).

Each composition type may be said to correspond to a *dominant* communicative purpose. (Generally, there is a multiplicity of aims in any given piece of discourse, but it is possible to identify a dominant aim or purpose).

3.6 The *purpose* of communication thus becomes crucial to the rhetorical structure, and hence the coherence, of composition. The rhetorical structure, or *plan*, for each type of composition is triggered off by the *purpose*: each 'type' of composition involves the selection of a dominant *communicative purpose*, which entails the selection of a set of *communicative functions*, further involving the selection of a set of *communicative acts*.

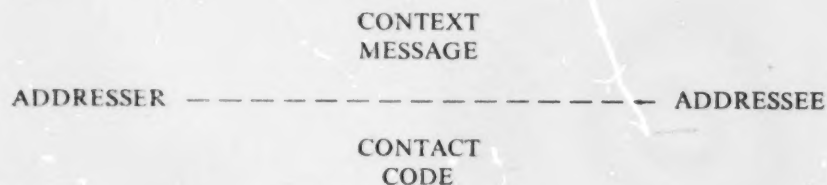
We attempt to represent this in the diagram below :



Theoretically, this model permits us to characterise and specify each 'type' of composition in terms of its rhetorical structure—in terms, that is, of the communicative functions and acts which have to be realised in it. It may be possible, theoretically, to *predict* the communicative functions and acts involved in a given composition type determined by *purpose*.

3.7 A convenient basis for determining the *communicative purpose* of discourse is available in the models proposed by Jakobson (1960) and Hymes (1962), which are briefly described below.

3.8 Jakobson (1960) categorises the various functions of language in terms of 'constitutive factors in any speech event', which may be represented thus :



Hymes (1962) altered the Jakobson model by modifying some of the terms and introducing a seventh 'speech factor'. The categories proposed by him are :

1. Sender (Addresser)
2. Receiver (Addressee)

3. Message Form (Message)
4. Channel (Contact)
5. Code
6. Topic (Context)
7. Setting

The various functions of language are specified by Jakobson and Hymes in terms of the speech factor which is *predominant* in any act of communication.

The following table lists the various language functions, together with the predominant speech factor to which each function corresponds :

Predominant Speech Factor	Language Function
Sender	Expressive (Emotive, Affective, Attitudinal, etc.)
Receiver	Conative (Persuasive, Directive, Rhetorical Pragmatic, etc.)
Topic	Referential (Expository, Informative, Cognitive, Denotative, etc.)
Message Form	Poetic (Literary, etc.)
Channel	Phatic (Contact)
Code	Metalinguistic
Setting	Contextual (Situation, etc.)

Although acts of communication are normally influenced by all or several of these speech factors, *one* of them is frequently predominant, and communication is primarily oriented towards this factor. This orientation is used to characterise the function.

Thus, *expressive* discourse is primarily oriented towards the *sender*, rather than the *receiver* or the *topic*. *Persuasive* discourse is primarily

oriented towards the *receiver*, while *referential* (or *expository*) discourse is primarily oriented towards the *topic*.

(Different terms have been used by various writers to refer to the functions of language. The table above lists the terms most commonly used; those preferred by Hymes have been indicated first.)

3.9 The four 'types' of discourse categorised by Kinneavy (1971) on the basis of *purpose* (aim) are :

- i. Reference
- ii. Persuasive
- iii. Literary
- iv. Expressive

(There is a close match, as seen from the table, between Kinneavy's categories and those derived from the Jakobson-Hymes scheme, though Kinneavy claims to have arrived at his categories independently of the Jakobson model.)

3.10 It was found necessary, in the present study, to delimit the inquiry by concentrating on a single composition 'type'. The 'type' selected for investigation was *expository* (reference) writing. The rationale for this decision is discussed below.

3.11 Since the investigation was intended to be primarily pedagogical, it was felt desirable to relate the 'types' of composition to be investigated to those most frequently undertaken by students, in fulfilment of their academic and professional/life needs.

It was apparent that the most useful 'types' of composition, where students are concerned, are the expository and the persuasive. Of these, the former has much greater relevance to the academic needs of students.

3.12 Expository or informative writing (primarily oriented to the *topic* of discourse) corresponds most closely to the *ideational* function of language posited by Halliday (1970), while persuasive writing (primarily oriented to the *receiver*) corresponds to the *interpersonal* function.

As Halliday observes, the ideational function is related to the *experiential* world. Despite the famous Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which maintains that 'reality' is largely the product of the cultural-linguistic grid through which human beings perceive it, one can assert that there is certainly a 'real' universe which exists independently of human perception and language. This 'real', or experiential, universe may be described as a *logico-semantic* universe, since the categories which make it up correspond to the categories

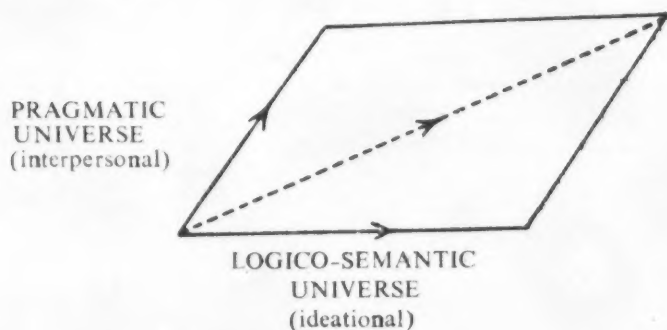
evolved by logic and semantics. These categories may be regarded as universal and constant.

The experiential or logico-semantic universe provides the essential content of human communication: the 'things' that people talk 'about'.

The experiential universe is constantly being acted upon and modified by another kind of 'reality'—the *pragmatic universe*, which represents the entire web of socio-cultural structures, functions, roles, bonds and obligations governing human interaction. The pragmatic universe consists of 'man-made realities', invented by man in his attempt to come to terms with the 'natural', *logico-semantic* universe. Thus, man perceives the logico-semantic universe through a pragmatic filter.

The pragmatic universe provides the 'content' of Halliday's *interpersonal* function of language, just as the logico-semantic universe constitutes the 'content' of the *ideational* function.

In Halliday's scheme, these two functions seem to overlap and co-exist. However, it has been proposed, in our study, that the two functions exist, essentially, in a state of dialectical tension. We represent this diagrammatically, below:



What we have here is a 'parallelogram of forces'. The interacting 'forces' which constitute the parallelogram are *logic*, which is universal and constant, and *pragmatic function* or *purpose*, which is variable (being determined by a complex of socio-cultural factors). The *resultant* of these two 'forces' may be termed RHETORIC. Rhetoric is thus the *product* of the ideational and the interpersonal functions of language operating concurrently, in tandem—a product, that is, of *universal logic* any *pragmatic purpose*. Thus, while there is always a core of universal logic in any 'type' of communication (the logico-semantic content), that core is moulded into a variety of rhetorical shapes and patterns by the pragmatic purpose of

communication. *Rhetoric* may be regarded, therefore, as logic modified by purpose—the logic of convenience!

In expository writing, as was stated above, the ideational function is far more important than the interpersonal. We are largely, almost exclusively, concerned here with the logico-semantic categories of the experiential world (which are sought to be captured in Halliday's transitivity system): actions, events, processes, states, and the persons, objects, spatial and temporal 'settings' etc., involved in these actions, events, processes, etc. The patterns of language function involved in such communication are fairly stable, universal and *predictable*. (One may predict, with some success, the communicative functions and acts involved in expository writing).

Persuasive discourse, on the other hand, is far more dependent on cultural and contextual (situational) variables, and hence more unpredictable with regard to its rhetorical structure.

In a sense, by choosing to investigate expository rather than persuasive writing, we chose the line of least resistance. From a sociolinguistic point of view, the rhetorical problems created in persuasive discourse by such variables as addresser-addressee relationships, socio-cultural expectations, obligations and privileges, contextual setting, etc., are far more interesting and challenging. However, since the techniques adopted in this study were purely of a tentative and exploratory nature, it was considered safer to work in a sheltered area of relative stability. Similar techniques could perhaps be used to investigate persuasive as well as other types of discourse.

3.13 Hypothetically, the rhetorical structure of expository writing may be represented by the following scheme :

Composition Type : Expository (Reference)

Level

I *Communicative Purpose :*

Informing (Conveying information)

II *Communicative Functions :*

- a. Narration
- b. Description
- c. Summarising
- d. Interpretation
- e. Explanation

III *Communicative Acts :*

- i. identifying actions, events, processes;
- ii. identifying the participants and objects involved in these actions, events and processes, the relationships between them,

and the roles (actor, instrument, beneficiary, etc.) performed by them;

- iii. identifying the *temporal* and *spatial* relationships between actions, events, participants, objects, etc.
- iv. identifying *cause-effect* relationships;
- v. identifying motivations for actions;
- vi. making *comparisons* and *contrasts*;
- vii. *classifying* events, participants, etc.
- viii. providing *illustrations* or examples;
- ix. formulating *hypotheses*;
- x. testing hypotheses against facts;
- xi. drawing *inferences* from available evidence;
- xii. making *speculations* for which evidence is not directly available;
- xiii. making *generalisations*;
- xiv. drawing *conclusions*;
- xv. offering *comments*, etc.

The inventory of communicative functions and acts above is purely intuitive and *ad hoc*; it is in no sense intended to provide a comprehensive and reliable taxonomy. The hierarchy proposed here is only an incomplete one; thus, although we postulate that the communicative purpose of *informing* probably involves five different communicative functions, we are unable (at present) to say which communicative acts make up a particular function. Furthermore, we are not sure whether some of the communicative 'acts' (Level III) may not more appropriately be termed 'functions' (Level II).

3.14 The *coherence* of a given piece of expository writing could be 'tested', it was felt, by investigating whether it contained all or some of the the *expected* communicative functions and acts—that is, whether its rhetorical structure conformed to the *predicted* rhetorical structure.

3.15 It was recognised, however, that the 'effectiveness' of a piece of writing could not be related *solely* to the performance of a stipulated set of communicative functions and acts. To advance such a hypothesis (relating the effectiveness of writing exclusively to the performance of communicative functions and acts) would be to reduce communication from a dynamic and on-going *process* to a static *structure*.

It was hypothesised, therefore, that the 'effectiveness' of expository writing (which was assumed to be a function of *coherence*), is determined partly by its *rhetorical structure* and partly by a set of *informational strategies*, which determine the 'quality' of the information contained and displayed in the text.

Some of these *informational strategies* identified in this study, are:

i. the '*synthesis*' of information

(This involves the ability to adopt a 'global' perspective of the 'facts' and to present them through a unifying framework, binding together all the 'local' details. Frequently, this 'synthetic' view of the facts is represented by a 'topic generalisation'—the 'topic sentence' of conventional rhetoric—which serves to introduce, define and de-limit the thematic content. The 'topic generalisation' occurs, typically, at the beginning of a paragraph. It may occur, however, at the end, as a 'concluding summary', or even elsewhere in the discourse).

ii. the '*structuring*' of information

(This refers to the organisation of information into hierarchically structured 'blocks', of subordinate, coordinate and superordinate 'themes'.

The presence of such hierarchical structures facilitates the process of information retrieval.

An important difference between speech and writing is that while the 'display' of information in the former is essentially *linear* and 'horizontal', the information contained in writing can be displayed *vertically* as well—that is, in patterns of superordination, coordination and subordination).

iii. the '*weightage*' of information

(The retrieval of information from a text involves a preliminary 'evaluation' of information: 'important' pieces of information receive more attention than those which are peripheral.

The writer can aid the reader in evaluating information by assigning a system of 'weightages' to the different items of information. One such device is the *placement*, or positioning, of an item of information in the text. Thus, the writer may choose to present the most important item of information at the beginning of a paragraph, as a topic statement, or at the end, as a concluding summary).

iv. the '*signposting*' of information

(This relates to the explicit linguistic signals used to indicate logical relationships, transitions, etc.

In general, the more clearly information is 'signposted', the easier it is to retrieve. However, if the signposting is made too obvious and elaborate, it can irritate and distract the reader).

v. the 'redundancy' of information

(Information retrieval is generally facilitated through 'redundancy', or the 'repetition' of key items of information. This is, however, far more important in speech than in writing; in fact, redundancy can also be a source of irritation and distraction).

vi. the 'surprise value' of information

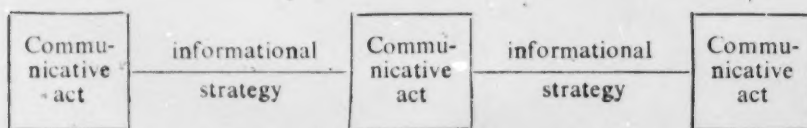
(The ability to control and vary the 'predictability' of items of information. In general, items of information which are predictable are 'inferior' to those with low predictability).

vii. the 'tonality' of information

('Tone' refers to the *attitude* which a writer adopts in relation to both his reader and the topic. It serves mainly a *phatic* or 'indexical' function, setting up a certain kind of relationship between the writer and the reader.

While 'tone' (or addressee-relationship) is much more important in persuasive writing, it can influence the quality of information even in expository writing).

3.16 In the scheme proposed above, expository writing is seen as comprising a set of communicative acts linked together by a set of informational strategies. This model may be represented as in the diagram below:



This model is comparable to the syntactic model proposed by Seuren (1969), in which a series of 'nuclear items' is held together by a string of 'operators'. The communicative acts, in our model, correspond to the nuclear items, or the 'propositional cores'.

4.0 Sections 3.0 - 3.16 (above) provide a rough outline of the conceptual apparatus used, in the study, to investigate the advanced skills of composition, in English and the mother tongue.

We shall now describe the instruments and procedures used in conducting the empirical investigation.

It was decided to ignore completely, for this study, the grammatical (syntactic and lexical) aspects of composition.

The study involved the administration of a series of three 'tasks', designed as tests of the 'advanced skills' of composition. The purpose of these tests was to investigate :

a. whether students at the undergraduate level possessed, in *English as well as in their mother tongues*, the 'advanced skills' necessary for the production of expository writing, and were able to :

i. control and manipulate the *rhetorical structure* of such writing—i.e., to perform adequately all or some of the communicative functions and acts involved ;

ii. control and manipulate the *informational strategies* involved—i.e., to structure, arrange and focus the 'informational display' efficiently ;

b. whether these advanced skills did, in fact, contribute to the 'effectiveness' of expository writing—i.e., whether the ability to control the rhetorical structure and informational strategies resulted in the effectiveness of such writing.

The most significant part of the investigation was the attempt to compare the rhetorical structures and informational strategies used in writing in English with those used in the mother tongue. So far, no other study of this kind seems to have been reported.

The tests were administered to a sample population of 100 college students of the B.A. and B.Sc. (Final Year) Class, drawn from three colleges in Orissa. (One of these colleges is reputed to attract some of the 'brightest' students in the state; the second represents a fairly 'average' level of academic achievement while the third, located at a semi-rural centre, represents the lowest level of achievement.)

The students in each college were divided into two random groups (by a system of lots) of approximately equal strength. For the first test, one of these groups was required to write in English, while the other wrote in the mother tongue. For the next test, the 'English' group wrote in the mother tongue, while the 'mother tongue' group wrote in English. The tasks were alternated again for the final test : thus, each student wrote alternately in English and the mother tongue.

4.1 For the three tests, the subjects were required to produce short (150 – 300 word) pieces of composition in response to three different stimuli, which were largely non-verbal.

The tasks were intended to test, in general, the abilities involved in expository writing. Each task had, however, a specific focus. It might be said that each task presented the subjects with a particular set of *communication problems* to be solved.

We attempted, in designing these tasks, to *control* the precise rhetorical structures and informational strategies required for each task, which were, however, expected to form a part of the total inventory of such structures and strategies predicted for expository writing.

For Task I, the subjects were required to 'write about' a short (4 minute) film, without a sound track. The film, which was specially produced for the experiment, presented three episodes making up a 'story', each of which contained a number of incidents. Within each episode, as well as between episodes, there existed a number of cause-effect relationships: in fact, the entire structure of narration depended on the network of cause-effect relationships.

The problem (which the subjects had to solve) was created by upsetting both the chronology and the causality of events. What the task set out to test, essentially, was the ability of the subjects to restore the 'proper' chronology and identify and present the cause-effect relationships involved.

For Task II, the subjects were given a set of 28 cartoons making up a 'story' in two parts. There were two 'parallel' episodes here, requiring the subjects to make, essentially, a *contrastive analysis* (identify similar and dissimilar elements, etc.).

The 'story' used was a piece of 'science fiction', which did, however, test certain rhetorical abilities highly relevant to scientific discourse, such as the description of apparatus and scientific processes, the formulation and testing of hypotheses, making of inferences, statement of generalisations, etc. One particular rhetorical pattern which was felt to be highly significant here was the identification of different *input-output* (cause-effect) relationships.

Task III required the subjects to correlate and interpret a set of facts presented through a tabular diagram. (The subjects had to prepare a 'report' showing the relationships between the rainfall, the number of crash-helmets sold and of fatal motorcycle accidents in an imaginary town, over a seven-year period). The important rhetorical patterns involved here were: comparison, classification, making generalisations, drawing inferences, forming and testing hypotheses, etc.

4.2 The following procedures were used in comparing rhetorical structures and informational strategies in English and the mother tongue:

- i. The English scripts were carefully *edited* so as to eliminate all 'deviance' of syntax and lexis (as well as spelling and punctuation), without interfering with the rhetorical structure and informational strategies.
- ii. The mother tongue scripts were translated into English. The translation was done twice: first, a morpheme-to-morpheme translation was produced, which then served as the basis for a 'faithful' translation in acceptable English. The rhetorical structure and informational strategies were preserved as far as possible.

The editing as well as translation were done by the researcher, in order to achieve a measure of uniformity.

- iii. Each script was given a code number, indicating:
 - a. the college where the test was administered;
 - b. the 'number' of the test (in the series of three tests);
 - c. the language originally used (English or the mother tongue).
- iv. The scripts (300 in number) were divided by the researcher into three groups—good, average and poor—on the basis of a quick, impressionistic evaluation.
- v. The scripts were next distributed to 20 'judges' for evaluation. (The judges were *not* informed that these scripts had either been edited or translated from the mother tongue.)

Each 'judge' thus received 15 scripts. As far as possible, these were drawn equally from each of the three "ability groups" as well as from each of the three "task groups".

The 20 judges participating in the experiment were either members of the teaching faculty, or research scholars at the CIEFL, Hyderabad.

- vi. The judges were requested to evaluate the scripts with the following three considerations in mind:
 - a. how easy (or difficult) it was for the reader to recover information from a script;
 - b. the *amount* of information recovered (i.e., how many 'facts' it was possible for the reader to recover); and
 - c. the *quality* of the information recovered (e.g., whether the 'facts' were merely reported, or interpreted, or interpreted and evaluated as well).

What was proposed here was, in effect, a test of 'intelligibility', as an index of 'effectiveness'.

- vii. Each script was valued *twice* by the judges. The first time, the judges undertook an impressionistic, over-all evaluation and awarded one of the following grades: *Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, Not Satisfactory, Very Poor*.
- viii. The scripts were valued again by the same judges after an interval of two weeks. This time, they were offered a set of 12 possible criteria for evaluation, related to the rhetorical structure (the communicative functions and acts) and the informational strategies. They were asked, first, to indicate whether these criteria were acceptable, and to 'rate' them on the following scale: *Very Important, Important, Not Important*. They were then invited to offer other criteria of their own, to be used in evaluation.

The judges then used the criteria which they found acceptable, together with the criteria offered by them, to value the scripts. Numerical grades were awarded, against each criterion, on a 5-point scale and these were then totalled up, and percentile scores computed.

5.0 In conducting this investigation of rhetorical structures and informational strategies in English and the mother tongue, we *expected* to find that the performance of the subjects in the mother tongue would not be significantly superior to that in English.

It was expected, furthermore, that the subjects would, on the whole, be *deficient* in the 'advanced skills' of composition, both in English and the mother tongue.

If the tests confirmed these expectations, we felt it could legitimately be concluded that the deficiencies of students (at the college level) in composition are only partly due to the problems of syntax and lexis. Since students at this level do *not* normally have problems with syntax and lexis in their mother tongues, their deficiencies in composition could be ascribed largely to failure in acquiring the 'advanced skills'.

There is a wide-spread and deeply rooted assumption among teachers that the *only* problems which students have in composition are *linguistic* problems — chiefly, the problems of syntax. The 'teaching' of composition rarely amounts to anything more than the remedial teaching of grammar.

The current scene in applied linguistics seems to be heavily prejudicial to the primacy of syntax. The two most influential trends in language pedagogy today are 'cognitive teaching' and 'communicative teaching', both of which represent revolts against the dominance of syntax, and seem to be inspired by recent developments in 'macrolinguistic' theory. Normally, the response of language teachers to such developments is either an uncritical and

enthusiastic adulation, or an equally uncritical and irrational rejection: attempts to evaluate the new trends objectively, to separate the grain from the chaff, are dismally rare. On the whole, a healthy scepticism to such developments is vastly preferable to the unabashed 'bandwagoning' which is much in evidence today; on the other hand, there can be little justification for rejecting ideas because they are new.

When the design of the present study was being evolved, most teachers of English with whom it was discussed were frankly sceptical about its relevance and utility. They were quite positive that if the problems of syntax and lexis were overlooked (as proposed), there would be no other significant problem for investigation. A very senior teacher remarked: "What you are doing is a luxury; it is like offering psychiatry to a starving man".

Considerations of space prevent us from presenting the detailed interpretations of the empirical data obtained; however, the evidence available indicates that students in the final year of college are equally deficient in the 'advanced skills' of composition in their mother tongues and English. The deficiencies seem to be as much cognitive as linguistic: most students seem to be incapable of solving communication problems efficiently.

The implications of this study, for the present, seem to be:

- a. Instruction in the 'higher-order' communication skills in the mother tongue seems to be as much in need of improvement as instruction in English. Most students are inefficient users of their mother tongues, as far as the solving of communicative problems is concerned.
- b. The teaching of the 'composition skills' in English is totally inadequate, in the existing situation.

In most cases, the composition skills are not *taught*, but merely *tested*. Composition seems to be regarded as *product*, rather than *process* — as something the student should be able to 'do' *after* he has 'learnt the language'. It is assumed that if the student acquires the ability to use the language 'correctly' — i.e., to handle the grammatical systems in the language — the acquisition of the other skills, such as those of logical organisation and structuring, will follow as a matter of course. However, our investigation indicates that such an assumption may be unwarranted; a significantly high proportion of undergraduate students do *not* seem to be able to acquire the 'hyper-grammatical' skills, possibly because the present system of instruction does not cater to them. When there is any 'teaching' of composition at all, it tends to emphasize only the 'mechanics' of composition, including syntax.

Instruction in 'functional' writing —i.e., writing for academic and professional/life needs—should provide training in the solving of communicative problems, as well as practice in the use of the grammatical mechanisms of language.

Perhaps it is assumed that the 'advanced skills' can, or should be, taught only *after* the learner has acquired the grammatical foundations of composition. However, there is no need to 'phase' the teaching of composition in this manner; we can certainly require the learner to attempt challenging problem-solving activities, involving genuine acts of communication, even before he has 'mastered' the syntax of the target language.

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